

The Quarterly Newsletter of the American Medical Writers Association–Delaware Valley Chapter (AMWA-DVC)

AMWA-DVC Year-End President’s Report for 2008–2009

By Barbara Rinehart, MS

The American Medical Writers Association–Delaware Valley Chapter (AMWA-DVC) is a 501(c)(6) nonprofit organization serving Eastern Pennsylvania, Delaware, and New Jersey. As in years past, AMWA-DVC has provided excellent benefits for its membership in programming, volunteer opportunities, networking, and subsidization. Due to growth and communication changes, the chapter voted to change its bylaws early in the year. These changes were accepted by the National Office and are available to the chapter membership at www.amwa-dvc.org. Even in the economic downturn, AMWA-DVC has presented stellar and profitable programming.

Membership Demographics

AMWA-DVC is the largest of the 21 domestic and international chapters comprising AMWA. Having almost 900 members gives the chapter unique opportunities to lead the profession of medical writing. In fact, many chapter leaders go on to serve the National organization, bringing local insight to a broader community.

Membership to the AMWA-DVC chapter averaged 890 members since the last report, with an average of 19 drops per month and 19 new members each month. All new members are sent a membership packet, which includes information about AMWA, types of medical writing positions, and volunteer opportunities.

Each year since 2004, DVC recognizes individuals who achieved an anniversary of 10+ years of membership (counting in 5-year intervals). In 2009, we honored 49 members (including one who has been a member for 45 years) with certificates and listing in the summer issue of the Delawriter (see online archive at www.amwa-dvc.org/delawriter).

Volunteers

The only reason for DVC’s success is the generosity of its volunteers. In return, there are many rewards for volunteer work, especially in a professional context. Involvement increases potential for peer recognition. More importantly, dedicated volunteers find invaluable personal and professional satisfaction in developing marketable skills in many sectors, including leadership experience, educational programming, human resources or project management, and technical and financial skills.

Two new key volunteer positions were created this year—Calendar Master (Don Harting) and Toolkit Editor (Mary Howe)—among the many other revolving committee volunteer positions. The chapter is in constant need of volunteers to keep programs and projects moving. In an effort to communicate to potential new volunteers, an AMWA-DVC promotional business card was created to help people take that first step to call and say, “I am willing to help.”

Approximately 64 individuals accepted this challenge and contributed their time this year, frequently on multiple occasions; their names appeared in the summer 2009 Delawriter. In addition, others served as teachers at the Princeton Conference or as authors for this newsletter.

During the June business meeting, President Barbara Rinehart individually recognized each of the Executive Committee members
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as well as Key Volunteers and presented 18 President Awards (a \$35.00 gift certificate from Borders Books emblazoned with the new AMWA-DVC logo) to these dedicated individuals. All other chapter volunteers were recognized collectively. We thank all of you!

Events

With a very active PA and NJ program committee, AMWA-DVC now provides programming each month from September through June, except for October when the National Conference is held. We had over 300 individuals attend events this year. In addition to dinner meetings, other formats such as tours, brunch, and networking events have proved very successful. For details refer to the calendar at www.amwa-dvc.org/events. Thanks go to Janet Manfre and Kira Belkin for their ongoing efforts throughout the year. And thank you to Julie Munden who currently leads the PA Program Committee with help from many new volunteers.

DVC offers the only chapter-sponsored Annual Freelance Workshop. This 1-day event held at Normandy Farms in Blue Bell, Pennsylvania, offered a 4-panel morning discussion and 16 afternoon roundtables on a wide variety of freelance-related topics. Capacity was full, with 77 attendees. Refer to DVC's Web site for a permanent archive of slides from presentations (www.amwa-dvc.org/freelance). In addition to our e-blast, advertising via LinkedIn was initiated. Gratitude goes to Lori De Milto and Jennifer Maybin, co-chairs, for making this a great program. For the coming year (2009-2010), Lori and Julie Munden will serve as co-chairs.

The 13th Annual Princeton Conference was an intensive 1-day event held in Princeton, New Jersey, as part of AMWA's Core Certificate

Program. This year's program offered a choice of 4 core workshops plus 2 communication-oriented noncredit workshops. Conference turnout was excellent with 74 attendees. In addition to providing a valuable regional educational benefit, this endeavor provided a net profit of \$6,647.92 to the chapter. Kudos to Brian Bass for great success year after year.

A "Greet and Go" get together was organized by Lisa Breck and Lori De Milto at the national convention; many attended this event and there are plans to continue this next year. The networking event sponsored by RPS was a favorite and the chapter also has plans to do this in the future if RPS is willing. DVC continues to highly subsidize non-curriculum events as a tangible member benefit. We are grateful for the time given from the many individuals who organized, assisted, or participated in these successful events!

Delawriter Newsletter

The *Delawriter* is a major communication vehicle for the chapter and acts as an archive for chapter events as each quarterly issue can be found on the Web site at www.amwa-dvc.org/delawriter. The newsletter reviews programs, presents chapter communications, recognizes volunteers, keeps members in touch with National activities, and provides opportunities for volunteer writers to get their name in print while offering information of interest to their peers. New submissions are always welcome. Thanks go to Alan Struthers and Eileen Girtten for getting the presses rolling on time.

Web Site

The chapter Web site at www.amwa-dvc.org houses our event calendar, *Delawriter* archive, volunteer lists and opportunities, job

postings, listserv information, toolkit for new writers, and a freelance resource page. As the maintenance of a Web site this extensive grows, so does our need for volunteers. We thank Lisa Vawter for carrying the load this year. The chapter has hired a designer to revamp the site and create a content management system to make updating and maintenance an easier task.

Listserv

Every month one or more e-blasts go to our membership announcing programs. Behind the scenes, Kate Casano makes this happen. Our Listserv is the only method the chapter uses to post jobs. To post a job, submit a brief (50 to 100 words) description as text in the body of an e-mail to kate@casano.com. Thanks go to Kate Casano, Listserv Coordinator, for constantly and consistently handling these timely posts.

Financial Report

The Finance Committee has monthly responsibilities throughout the 2008–2009 term as well as tax preparation oversight. Total funds for the checking account and money market are at \$42,064.80 as of the May 2009 reconciliation. Since revenues were below \$50,000, an internal rather than external audit is required. Receipts and expenditures were well within budget. Several new unbudgeted items were discussed at the summer planning meeting under the term of Lisa Breck, president. Because of the chapter's nonprofit status and increasing activities, a new CPA has been hired. Many thanks go to Michael Pappas who served a 2-year term for his tireless efforts of monthly reconciliations, check writing, and balancing the books. Respectively submitted, Barbara Rinehart, MS

Breaking Into Pharmaceutical or Medical Communications Companies

Gabriele Dietrich, PhD

On May 16, 2009, at the 13th Annual Princeton Conference, Marc Grobman of MG Communications located in Fanwood, New Jersey, shared his experience as a communications specialist for the pharmaceutical industry in a workshop entitled, “Breaking into the Pharma Agency/ MedCom Sector.”

He began his presentation with an explanation of the differences between his work experience in medical communications companies and pharmaceutical ad agencies. “Copywriters usually write for an advertising agency with the intent to promote. Medical writing is about medical conditions and is scientific,” said Grobman. Medical communications agencies prepare continuing medical education (CME) materials, organize conferences, and create webcasts. Pharmaceutical ad agencies serve pharmaceutical companies and prepare medical information about drugs for marketing salespeople who will present this information to physicians.

Grobman stated that teamwork is a factor when writing for pharmaceutical ad agencies or medical communications companies. As an example of an effective team approach, he spoke of his experience working for a unit that provided support for an unbranded program to help patients with hypertension. All writers and artists participated regularly in brainstorming sessions that ultimately resulted in the creation of patient brochures, patient and physician Web sites, and promotional materials for physicians. Grobman noted that in spite of the team approach, many of these companies may offer only contract work and it is not unusual for a writer to leave once a project is completed. However, that

same writer may be asked to return to the same company for a new project.

Grobman offered hints about breaking into the medical writing profession, suggesting that potential medical writers familiarize themselves with specific treatment areas, especially ones in which new drugs are being developed, and list these areas on their CV. Grobman also suggested reading *The New England Journal of Medicine*, taking AMWA basic science and medicine courses, and learning medical terminology. He handed out a glossary of basic terms for writers and editors and stressed that it is important to learn the *AMA Manual of Style*, know proofreading symbols, and be familiar with Boolean commands to use search engines effectively.

Grobman concluded the workshop with these strategies:

- Never send out a job application letter with typing errors.
- Work with more than one recruiter and be honest about your work history.
- Keep a log of where you apply. A good recruiter will not send out your CV without asking you, and it is important to tell the recruiter if you have applied to a company within the last six months.
- Be prepared to answer what kind of position you desire, if you are willing to relocate, and what your salary requirements are.

Gabriele Dietrich, PhD, is a principal of Whole Health Communications, a medical communications company in Central New Jersey.

Want to Write for the Delawriter?

Volunteer to cover an AMWA-DVC event or write articles about the following topics:

- Helpful hints for Word, PowerPoint, Adobe, Excel
- Graphing do's and don'ts
- Proofing tools and techniques
- Setting up an ergonomically friendly home office
- Online searching strategies
- The new PubMed
- Navigating the new FDA Web site
- Job search strategies
- Designing Web sites
- Systems thinking
- A day in the life of . . . a freelance writer, a regulatory writer, an editor, a marketing writer
- Volunteering
- Interviewing strategies

If you are interested or would like more details, please e-mail Eileen at delawriter@amwa-dvc.org.

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Moving From Online to On-site Social Networking With AMWA-DVC

Amy Rovi

Social networking sites, such as LinkedIn and Twitter, have become popular online communication strategies for medical writers, but there is no substitute for the real thing—social networking in person. On September 29, 2009, over 40 attendees gathered in Plymouth Meeting, Pennsylvania, for hors d'oeuvres, drinks, and on-site social networking. For twelve of these attendees, this was their first AMWA-DVC event.

Julie Munden, a member of the AMWA-DVC Pennsylvania Program Committee, organized the event in an effort to give back to the chapter. “I am a big believer in ‘pay it forward,’ and as an AMWA-DVC member for over 7 years, I wanted to help fellow writers since many have inspired me with my writing and editing business.”

Munden greeted each member upon arrival with a pat on the back—and a sticky note attached. The note listed the name of a famous person. After welcoming comments from AMWA-DVC President, Lisa Breck, Munden described the first exercise. Members had to circulate and ask questions of others in order to determine the identity of the famous person written on the sticky note. Munden liked the “Famous Person” icebreaker “because it helped to warm us all up and it also led to some engaging conversation. That was my goal—to break the ice.”

The second exercise was “Speed Networking” whereby attendees stood in 2 concentric circles. Attendees in the outer circle faced attendees in the inner circle. Attendees were given one minute to describe who they were, what they do, and how they might be able to help each other. After time was called, the outer

circle took one step to the right and initiated a new conversation with the next person. There was a rapid information exchange as people scurried to pull out pens, pads of paper, and business cards to capture important contacts, revered Web sites, and other resources before moving on to the next round. Munden especially liked this exercise because it built on the previous icebreaker and gave the attendees a chance to showcase their businesses while learning more about another’s business. “And, although most of us are in the same field, it’s not who you know directly, it’s who you know that they know... your second circle of contacts. There was great discussion and I know that people even got some job prospects out of the exercise,” said Munden.

Ana Maria Rodriguez-Rojas, also a member of the Pennsylvania Program Committee, coordinated the registration. “I loved the event. It was great and the feedback I got from others was also very positive. I love AMWA-DVC. The people are so professional and at the same time, so nice.”

Many attendees who have maintained ongoing online relationships with fellow writers for years through LinkedIn, Twitter, and e-mail finally had the chance to meet in person at this networking event. “Medical writers, especially freelancers, tend to be more geographically diverse and we’re often connected to colleagues and clients electronically rather than face-to-face. So, it’s great to meet in person with someone you’ve connected with by phone or e-mail in the past. We are a smaller community than we often realize,” said Dave Schroeder, AMWA-DVC member and on-site registration desk volunteer.

“I think we should periodically do these networking meetings because it will be a great chance to build relationships and bring in new members,” said Munden. If you are interested in coordinating an AMWA-DVC social networking event in your area, please contact Linda Felcone at volunteer@amwa-dvc.org

Amy Rovi has more than 15 years of medical education training and corporate pharmaceutical experience in numerous therapeutic areas. Her company, Medivor, LLC, develops and edits regulatory reports and medical marketing materials for Web and print.

November Dinner Meeting in New Jersey

Committee Publication Planning: Issues and Opportunities

Experts will discuss steps involved in publication planning, current issues, and opportunities for medical writers. They will address decisions about the timing and desired place of publication and how increased vigilance of industry sponsorship has affected publication planning?

MEETING DETAILS:

Thursday, November 17, 2009

5:30–8:30 PM

Holiday Inn Princeton

Contact Kira Belkin

kbelkin@att.net

Helpful Hints for Medical Writers and Medical Editors

Eileen Girten, MS,

I asked medical writers and editors in the DVC to describe how they are handling this economy and received the responses below.

What I'm finding is that writers and editors are scrambling to find work in this economy. Those who are adaptable and able to take on different types of projects are able to navigate the rough waters.

Personally, I took on a 3-month contract project that I normally wouldn't have considered. It ultimately turned out to be a great experience, and I did get a full-time position after that contract ended, but it required some adaptation on my part. The lessons learned from the tough times should not be forgotten and can help us all prosper as writers and editors.

—April Reynolds, MS, ELS

My advice to freelance medical writers in the current economy, or in any economy, is as follows:

- Build enduring relationships with your clients based on honesty and mutual respect.
- Take on more than you can handle because projects rarely come through as and when they are expected.
- When everything does come through as and when expected (see #2), suck it up, get it done, and be glad to have too much work.
- Don't say "yes" to a project you know you're going to regret taking on just because you're starved for work. A bad project is a bad project, and it won't get better just because you need it to. Instead, put the time and effort into cultivating good clients.

—Brian Bass

As an editor, I'm finding that flexibility is the key ingredient in

this economy. If a client asks me to "be on call" for possible work on Monday, I say yes, even if that means I will need to "check in" with them all day long. Because I work remotely from all my clients about 90% of the time, this "on call" status doesn't prevent me from carrying on with my other work. I simply need to check in via Web mail or a client's server to see if I'm needed. The client benefits from my flexibility because, for whatever reason, there is no one else available to handle small or large tasks during a particular time. Although I am inconvenienced, I am building goodwill, and that goodwill has gained me recommendations, repeat work (much bigger projects), and client loyalty. In this market, the client may not have enough work to keep a freelance busy, but keeping our ties keeps us connected for bigger jobs in the future.

In the same vein, I offer to work on-site (although it's not my preferred style) when the client needs another editor for a big project or to fill in for vacationing staff. The willingness to

work on-site gives the client security.

Accepting work outside my usual and preferred skill set is also helpful. For instance, a client for whom I edit asked me to provide literature surveillance for several products. This task is somewhat tedious, but I have found that it has increased my knowledge of this client's products and improved my research skills. The project has expanded my knowledge and my skill set. And, it has gained me goodwill with the client.

An economic downturn like the current one offers opportunities to stretch yourself beyond your comfort zone—accept jobs that force you to stretch or learn new skills—but *only* if you alert your client to your less-experienced or novice status, and be sure both you and your client are willing to take a risk.

Then remember to network, mentor others, seek mentors, take advantage of free or low-cost educational opportunities, and volunteer with your association.

—Jennifer Maybin, MA, ELS

Delawriter

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News and notes from the
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Seeking Web-savvy Volunteers

Do you have experience
designing or maintaining
Web sites? Join the
Web Site Committee
and help redesign and/or
maintain the DVC site.
For more information,
please contact
Lisa Vawter at
webchair@amwa-dvc.org.

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